



MCKENZIE WARK 2016-04-16

## THE FORCES OF REPRODUCTION

BIOPOLITICS,  
NECROPOLITICS

FATHERFUCKING, FEMINISM, GENDER, PHARMACO-PORNOGRAPHIC BIOCAPITALISM,  
QUEER, SEX

**"Humanity does not exist under the sign of the divine... but of the monstrous."**

— Paul B. Preciado

"Read, this!" he said, thrusting a soiled photocopy of a typescript into my hands. "It will change your life!" Then he disappeared back into the public toilet he was cruising. This was my introduction to the works of Foucault. It was an 'amateur' translation, made by a self-described "nasty street queen." And it did change my life, after a fashion. The most interesting books for me are always works of *low theory*. They may be written by people schooled in the high theory of the seminar room, but they take those sorts of intellectual resources and apply them directly to life.

*Testo Junkie* by Béatriz Preciado is such a book. It's a little rough and raw, but its brilliant. I never met Béatriz Preciado, and its unclear what pronoun would have been best, so I'm going for s/he, which cleaves the whole problem at a stroke. After this book came out, its author started using the name Paul B. Preciado.

S/he grew up in the dying days of Franco's Spain, where s/he was educated by Jesuits. Preciado's first psychoanalyst explained to at age 14 that s/he wanted to "arm wrestle God." S/he has traveled through at least four cities, three languages, and two genders. S/he met Derrida while studying philosophy at the New School, while he was writing about St Augustine, whose *Confessions* about changing faith reminded her of contemporary writings about changing genders. S/he lived in Paris for a while, then got a PhD in architecture from Princeton, which later became her first book, *Pornotopia*.

In *Testo Junkie*, s/he documents a short period of life when s/he took testosterone, and builds out an astonishing conceptual frame for thinking what that experience might mean. Its not a memoir. It may be a study of emotions, but only those ones that are not private. It is a "... a single point in a cartography of extinction."

Preciado is not sure if s/he is "a feminist hooked on testosterone, or a transgender body hooked on feminism." As for testosterone: "I take it to foil what society wanted to make of me, so that I can write, fuck, feel a form of pleasure that is post-pornographic, add a molecular prosthesis to my low-tech transgender identity composed of dildos, texts, and moving images; I

do it to avenge your death."

The death is that of French autofiction writer Guillaume Dustan. The book hovers between a memorial for him, and a celebration of her relations with writer and film maker Virginie Despentes: "fucking her is harder than factory work," but s/he comes to be "covered with my feminism as if with a diaphanous ejaculation, a sea of political sparkles."

The bulk of the book is not about such things. It is rather about what one can think by extension from such experience. It is about mapping the commodity economy centered on the management of bodies, sexes, identities, or what Preciado calls the "somatico-political," of how it finds itself both making and made over by "the sex-gender industrial complex." Its an exercise in what Bogdanov calls substitution, building a metaphoric account of how the whole world is made out of one's own experience of labor.

The most interesting kind of labor is now that of the "production of the species as species." The key objects to the sex-gender industrial complex are synthetic steroids, porn and the internet. What results is a pharma-porno-punk hypermodernity. It was hidden under the Fordist economy and now revealed by the latter's displacement onto the parts of the world. In what the Situationists usefully called the "over-developed world" of Europe, America and Japan, this hypermodernity now emerges as the engine of commodification.

"I look for keys to survival in books," Preciado writes. Scattered in *Testo Junkie* are useful lists of writers and artists for anyone who feels they need similar keys to survival: Jean Genet, Walter Benjamin, Monique Wittig, Susan Stryker, Edmund White, Faith Ringgold, Faith Wilding, Jill Johnson, Valerie Solanas, Silvia Federici, Ellen Willis, Kathy Acker, Sandy Stone, Shu Lea Chang, Diane Torr, Del LaGrace Volcano, Pedro Lemebel, Michelle Tea. As in any low theory book, the reading list is determined by a need to survive rather than disciplinary boundary keeping. What is of interest is how s/he pulls it off.

*Testo Junkie* goes far beyond a narrative account of the *affect* of a queer, bohemian experience. It starts producing its *concept*: "There is nothing to discover in sex or in sexual identity; there is no *inside*. The truth about sex is not a disclosure; it is *sexdesign*. Pharmaco-pornographic biocapitalism does not produce *things*. It produces mobile ideas, living organs, symbols, desires, chemical reactions..." Its not about the personal affects so much as the systematic effects that produce them.

Nor is all this something imposed entirely from without on some pre-existing natural body or sexuality. If there's an agency within the system, its not identifiable with a natural body. But there is nevertheless an agency that could have a politics, in and against the mesh. "What if, in reality, the insatiable bodies of the multitude – their cocks, clitorises, anuses, hormones, and neuro-sexual synapses – what if desire, excitement, sexuality, seduction, and the pleasure of the multitude were all the mainsprings of the creation of value added to the contemporary economy? And what if cooperation were a masturbatory cooperation and not the simple cooperation of brains?"

There's a challenge here to rethink what labor is in the twenty-first century. "The raw materials of today's production process are excitation, erection, ejaculation, and pleasure and feelings of self-satisfaction, omnipotent control, and total destruction." The production of sex-affect is now the model for all other kinds of production. "Sex is the corollary of capitalism and war, the mirror of production."

But rather than labor power or the general intellect, Preciado identifies that which is both producer and produced, the agency of the system, as *potentia gaudendi*, or orgasmic force, a capacity for being excited, exciting and being-excited-with. Capital is about "the transformation of our sexual resources into work." Capital tries to privatize *potentia gaudendi* but it exists really as an event, a practice, or perhaps an evolutionary process.

I'll come back to this *potentia gaudendi* later. For now, its crucial to grasp that for Preciado, it does not exist outside of technoscience. It isn't a natural core. In this regard its different to the sexpol of Willem Reich and all that descends from it. The market isn't an outside power repressing or even making work some natural given sexuality. Nor is the body even a coherent unit within this economy. "The sexual body is the product of a sexual division of flesh according to which each organ is defined by its function." Here s/he sounds like Friedrich Kittler's media archaeology, but of all of the sex-organs rather than just the sense-organs.

Others have written about how the internet changes certain things about the commodity form, including me. Preciado connects it to two other regimes: pharmacology and pornography. The pharma part includes the production of the Pill, Prozac, Viagra, while the porno part is a corresponding shot list of blow jobs, penetrations, spit-roastings and so forth. What the internet plus pharma and porno produce is a distinctive kind of control of women's bodies, while being attentive to the ejaculatory function of bodies coded as male.

To the extent that pharma-porno capitalism produces objects, they are just props for producing subjects. Those subjects are less coherent than they appear. Its more a system of plugging pills or dicks into mouths, dildos in vaginas, inserting silicone into breasts or transferring skin and fat from arms to make penises, spritzing images at eyeballs – and introducing hormones to bodies of all kinds.

It's a squishy version of Deleuze's 'control society' thesis: "A politically programmed ejaculation is the currency of this new molecular-informatic control." This is the age of the soft machine. There's a new regime of power more sophisticated than what

Foucault called the disciplinary. "The body no longer inhabits disciplinary spaces but is inhabited by them."

There are certain tensions in this system. On the one hand, these are technologies which have the potential to disassemble gender binaries, but on the other, there's a massive effort to produce and reproduce exactly those binaries. Pharma-porno capitalism fabricates the idea of a naturalism of sex and gender all the better to make tech that approximates that idea. All the better to sell image and chemical props to make bodies appear as if they follow the codes.

The sex-gender distinction, Preciado usefully reminds us, did not originate in feminism or the trans-community, but in the biotech industries. By producing a conceptual distinction between bodily sex and subjective gender, a whole industry could then emerge in which the one could be technically re-aligned with the other. But to be clear, Preciado does not think that the lack of naturalism of the trans-body in any way disqualifies it. All bodies lack this naturalism, and that's no bad thing. S/he is not against the techno-body, which may have as yet unexplored affordances. Rather, s/he is against the commodification and disciplinary control of the techno-body.

The existing sex-gender industrial complex produces and reproduces bodies according to a Platonic ideal of male/female forms. These are produced, varied, but also policed by the production of normative codes of gender aesthetics, of recognition etc, which allow subjects to default towards identities as male or female, hetero or homo, cis or trans. Sex assignment procedure for Preciado are based not just on external morphology but also reproductive capacity and social role –a shifting and unstable terrain anchored by a relentless production of images that reduce the messy nodes of both sex and gender to a binary form.

All kinds of codes are invented and re-invented for every sexualizable zone of the Platonic ideal of the body, but the anus has a problematic status in this schema: "it creates a short circuit in the division of the sexes. As a center of primordial passivity and a perfect locale for the abject, positioned close to waste and shit, it serves as the universal black hole into which rush genders, sexes, identities, and capital." No wonder ass-fucking is one of the defining genres of internet era porn, the site at one and the same time of all kinds of fantasies of male power and domination and of the ever present possibility of their destabilization.

Platonic sexual ideals of male and female are in ever-increasing need of tech and image props. Far from being 'natural', heterosexual reproduction is part of a vast technical apparatus. There is no bare life, there is only a bare techno-life. (As Botticelli might say as well). Heterosexuality is a politically assisted reproductive technology. (While it's not part of Preciado's beat, any cis-woman who has negotiated a 'birth plan' with a hospital will have a lot of thoughts about this!). Already by the end of the 50s, the supposedly natural reproductive system was becoming something else. Formula replaced or supplemented breast milk. Oral contraceptive pills were poised to become one of the most commonly ingested prescriptions of them all.

Preciado's thinking builds here on Teresa de Laurentis, and her critique of second wave feminism's naturalizing of femininity. Under the universality of the category of woman a host of other things are hiding as we now know, from race and class to technologies for producing and sustaining genders. De Laurentis introduced the provocative concept that there are technologies of gender. Gender becomes real when a representation of it becomes a self-representation, and those representations are industrially produced.

There's a tension between the pharma and porno wings of the sex-gender industrial complex. Image production has at its core a relentlessly Platonist ideal of two genders, and spends quite a bit of time exposing and categorizing ambiguous images in between. But from the point of view of medical, rather than media, production, the category of gender reveals the arbitrary and constructive character of biomedical interventions.

For example, hormone therapy is used to treat 'hirsutism' in women. There are standard tests for how hairy is too hairy, and these allow women access to hormone treatments to reduce things like facial hair. But the scale of hairiness is not an objective constant. The white female has a different standard of hairiness than, say Jewish or Hispanic ones. Medical-technical regimes are complicated applications of boundaries to bodies.

Another kind of example: the different legal-medical regimes that apply to getting a nose job versus a dick job. Your nose is your private property. If you think it is too big or too broad or something, that's your concern, as are any complicated racialized assumptions about the Platonic form of perfection of the nose. But if you want a dick job, that's something else. Removing one, or having one constructed on your body, is not a matter of the body as your private property. It's a matter of your body as a thing whose normative sex and gender is assigned by the state.

Bodies are not such coherent things, then. They are fabricated in meshes of images, tech, laws, and so on. "We are not a body without organs, but rather an array of heterogeneous organs unable to be gathered under the same skin." Pharma-porno gender is not just an ideology or an image or a performance. It gets under the skin. It's a political technology, "and the state draws its pleasure from the production and control of our pornogore subjectivity."

But its capital and tech rather than the state that most interests Preciado. "These artifacts (us) can't exist in a pure state, but only within our enclosed sexual techno-systems. In our role as sexual subjects, we're inhabiting biocapitalist amusement parks. We are men and women of the laboratory, effects of a kind of politico-scientific bio-Platonism." S/he usefully extends what is basically a Foucauldian way of thinking onto new terrain, where commodification and power meet.

In some ways this is a book about what Lyotard called 'libidinal economies,' which now work on digital and molecular tech that

produce sex, gender, sexuality and subjectivity. The pharma and the porno parts of this economy work in opposition as much as together. Porn is mostly propaganda for Platonist sex division. (There are of course niche tastes. One wonders what s/he would make of Mark Dery's essay on decapitation porn.) Gender-codes are continually mutating, distributing and redistributing, if mostly curling around the same bifurcated distribution.

But when it comes to pharma, there are only techno-genders, of increasingly ambiguous kinds. Lance Armstrong and F2M transmen are the product of the same kinds of hormones from the same kinds of labs. Príncipe wrote this book while taking testosterone. S/he thinks of herself as neither testogirl nor technoboy, but a port for inserting the hormone. S/he is aware that testosterone isn't masculinity. Her self-directed endocrinal reprogramming only makes sense together with a certain political agenda. S/he is doing it outside of any medical regime, because to partake in that is to give one's body over to the state's decisions about what your sex and gender are or should be, and what technologies will 'properly' align these divergent parts of the state's own property.

However, to do so is to risk getting caught in another disciplinary net – the one strung to catch 'addicts'. If her testosterone-taking is not sanctioned by one kind of medicalized discourse, it risks another. If s/he want to convince a doctor that there is a misfit between her sex and gender, there's a regime to deal with that. But if s/he wants to remain ambiguously between genders? If s/he want to take hormones for aesthetic reasons? And what is at stake in taking a drug which transforms the physical body as its direct goal and subjective feeling only secondarily, rather than the other way around? What, in other words, is at stake in the industrialization of the hormone?

The unconscious and the hormone are discovered around the same time. The former is about linguistic signs, but the latter about chemical signals in the body. The study of hormones – endocrinology – is a part of the founding or refounding of a wide range of knowledge on an 'episteme' of communication and information. There were some bumps along the way, as with any new science. (Even Bogdanov fell for some total pseudo-science about monkey-glands as a way of promote longevity and vitality.) In retrospect the surrealist monkey-gland moment in endocrinology actually did foreshadow what the field's ambitions were, if not its methods. "Hormonal theory represents another form of mass communication." Hormones act at a distance – they are a kind of telesthesia. As such they can act to 'discipline' a body without having to restrain it.

"Hormones are bio-artifacts made of carbon chains, language, images, capital, and collective desires." They are part of a genealogy of the techno-molecular control first of women (the Pill) now of men too: Testosterone, Viagra, etc. All sorts of bodies can be produced via artificial hormones, but they are still organized around the Platonist binary. Interestingly, the FDA at first rejected the Pill. The early versions suppressed menstruation altogether, which was too radical a technical reprogramming of gender. It was approved once the period cycle – or something mimicking it – was restored by lower dose formulations.

If Príncipe wants to go beyond Foucault's thinking on the disciplinary apparatus, s/he also wants to go beyond Judith Butler's thinking about gender performativity. Gender isn't just performative at the level of gesture and language, but also via a kind of biomimicry or biodrag. There's a molecular dimension, the pharma dimension. Perhaps we all do biodrag, a mimesis, more or less parodic, of the Platonic gender ideals, propping up our bodies with chemical assistance as much as dress codes.

These relatively new kinds of molecular power modify bodies themselves as living platforms: "We are certainly still confronting a form of social control, but this time it's a matter of control lite, a bubbly type of control, full of colors and wearing Mickey Mouse ears and the Brigitte Bardot low cut look, as opposed to the cold, disciplinary architecture of the panoptic illustrated by Foucault." Weaponized adorables for grown-ups. The movie *Sucker Punch* could well be a kind of weird Hollywood allegory for all that.

In a nightmare image, Príncipe writes of "a new type of high-tech heterosexuality...: the techno-Barbie, remaining eternally young and super-sexualized, almost entirely infertile and non-menstruating but always ready for artificial insemination and accompanied by a sterile super-macho whose erections are technically produced by a combination of Viagra and audio-visual pornographic codes..." Which suggests to me that there are no cis-gender bodies, as the term implies that one could be 'on the side' of a pre-given standard, when all such standards are now products of a sex-gender industrial complex. The innovation of Príncipe's work is to insist so thoroughly that all of sex, gender and identity are on the same level, all produced industrially, and by the same systems.

Príncipe does not mention hormone replacement therapy for menopausal women, but one could add that to this picture. The next frontier for the sex-gender industrial complex is probably marketing hormones to men without undermining their sense of masculinity. The masculine body has its own honor-codes of supposed naturalism. Taking steroids to improve athletic performance is somehow always 'wrong', even if Viagra can now be an accepted chemical modification of the male body for improving sexual performance.

For Príncipe, liberal feminism made a pact with the state and the pharmacology industry. It is not that defending Planned Parenthood is a bad thing, but that the unexamined component is the hormonal transformation of the body. Príncipe is also wary of feminisms that are complicit with the state, including on issues of pornography. It hardly bears repeating that when states increase the policing of pornography it is usually images of non-normative sexualities that are criminalized or excluded.

"Pornography is sexuality transformed into spectacle." It is now the paradigm of culture industry. "The culture industry is *porn envy*." Porn is the management of the excitation-frustration circuit. The culture industry now wants to produce the same

physiological effect. Porn may have more to do with freak shows and the circus than cinema. "Paris Hilton represents the zenith of the sexopolitical production of the luxury white heterosexual technobitch." But it only appears that s/he is living a reality-tv life of languid uselessness: her whole life is under surveillance. Pornography is doubled by scrutiny and control of the affects and discharges of bodies.

Porn is regulated by a kind of "Spermatic Platonism" in which only the cum shot is real. Porn produces the illusion of *potentia gaudendi*, when excitation is actually a more or less involuntary response. However, "pornography tells the *performative* truth about sexuality." One can claim that the sex in porn is merely performed and is thus unreal, or that the bodies are unreal, but this very unreality is precisely the Platonist normative forms around which the whole sex gender industrial complex is made to circulate.

Not only sex but labor is becoming pornified. We are all coming to work in a porn factory fueled by bodily fluids, synthetic hormones, silicon, stimulants, mood regulators and digital signs. Sexual labor transforms *potentia gaudendi* into commodities. If one were to look for what Gramsci would call the organic intellectuals of labor now, it would be among pornographers and sex workers. Sex workers are still the 'other' to most respectable people, but perhaps a wider definition of sex work would help. On a spa day with Virginia Despentès, Préciado discovers the erotics of the personal care industry. Perhaps some people would just rather have the actual massage than the happy ending, but in a way it's all sex work. Or perhaps, to riff off Préciado's line of thought further, we should think about both sex workers and 'gender workers' as on a continuum in the industrial production of bodies and their identities.

Préciado calls this a pornification rather than a feminization of labor. The concept of a feminization of labor assumes certain things about femininity. For one thing, it "omits the cum shot." And it still buys into Platonist gender absolutes. Affective labor is a girl thing; effective labor is a boy thing. Flexibility as a girl thing; stability as a boy thing.

Préciado is also hostile to the 'cognitive' or 'immaterial' labor thesis that bedevils the thought of the inheritors of Italian workerist theory such as Moulier Boutang, Lazzarato, or Hardt and Negri. "None of them mention the effects on their philosopher's cocks of a dose of Viagra accompanied by the right image." Perhaps this is a time of übermaterial, not immaterial, labor.

And it is not a 'sexual division of labor' but a pornographic one. The term 'sexual' in sexual division of labor silently sanctions a hetero view of reproduction, as if it goes without saying that only hetero reproduction is normal. It also takes the asymmetries of the hetero sex act as the norm. The list of body types that can be penetrated includes at least the bodies of cis-females, trans-females and gay men. The sexual division of labor concept also leaves out the technical apparatus within which it is produced.

There is no immaterial labor, nor is there a 'general intellect'. There is general sex. This might be another name for the *potentia guardini*, the "the impulse for communal joy that travels through the multitude, convulsing the totality of excitable producer-bodies of capital." Modernity is the sexualization of the domestic and the domestication of the sexual. The sexual-domestic coupling has mostly taken place under the sign of private property. (Infidelity is theft). But there's another side — *potentia guardini* — that which is both produced by, and enfettered by, the sex gender industrial complex.

Can we just admit that 'immaterial labor' was a terrible, useless concept? What is refreshing about low theory is that when it works it starts from actual experiences, then it appropriates and adapts concepts to fit the articulation of the experience. It's always a kind of *détournement* or high-jacking of high theory for other purposes. As such it tends to shun what might otherwise be endlessly productive research programs just for lack of evidence that their conceptual objects actually correspond to anything. Hence Préciado pretty ruthlessly cuts through some decades of social theory.

S/he doesn't see psychoanalysis, as traditionally understood, as all that much help either: "The father and mother are already dead. We are the children of Hollywood, porn, the Pill, the TV trashcan, the internet, and cyber-capitalism. The cis-girl wants to transform her body into a consumable image for the greatest number of gazes... She wants her pornification... to transform her body into abstract capital."

'Queer' too is becoming commodified, and critical thought and practice has to move on. But it has to steer away from both the apocalyptic temptation (speculative realism) and the messianic temptation (leaping communisms). **"Let us be worthy of our own fall and imagine for the time left the components of a new porno-punk philosophy."**

Préciado's program is to transform minority knowledge into collective experimentation, to work for the common ownership of the biocodes. Like Sueli Rolnik, s/he sees psychiatry as a foreclosing of aesthetic responses to creating subjectivity. S/he puts gender dissent in an aesthetic context, rather than one of dysphoria, pathology etc. S/he compares her taking of testosterone to Walter Benjamin taking hash, or Freud taking cocaine, or Micheux taking mescaline: a protocol for experiment not sanctioned by the state or the professions, and to be understood more as the construction of situations in everyday life.

"Political subjectivity emerges precisely when the subject does not recognize itself in its representation." That break creates the space not just for another kind of representation, but another life. Its time, s/he says, to become gender pirates or gender hackers: "We're copyleft users who consider sex hormones free and open biocodes." S/he calls for a "molecular revolution of the genders." There's no natural or private acts to which to return.

Praxis, then is "... a matter of inventing other common, shared, collective, and copyleft forms of the dominant pornographic

representations and standardized sexual consumption.” Those who are its objects can become its subjects. The organic intellectuals of such a movement are pornographers and sex workers as theorists. And as for practice, “... since the 70s, the only major revolution has been carried out by gays listening to music while getting high and fucking.”

I love this line in particular, as it could have come from my *A Hacker Manifesto*: **“Power experienced slippage; it shifted, throughout the previous century, from the earth to manufacturing, then toward information and life.”** But Préciado opens up a space for thinking that last bit – life – in a fresh way. Desire and sexuality, like information, or even as information – defy ownership: “my possession of a fragment (of information, desire, sex, gender) doesn't take it away from you.” Sharing multiplies desire, sex and gender.

But the idea of sexual liberation is obsolete. There's no pre-existing natural state of sex that is repressed, as we all learned from Foucault, whether from a 'street' photocopy or in grad school. Now we have to think about how to hack pharma-porno domination from within. Préciado has some slogans for it, each of which could equally well name a punk band or a conference: FreeFuckware! OpenGender! BodyPunk! PenetratedState! PostPorn! There is monstrous fun to be had. There are new bodies and their relations to sexdesign.

In the wake of Louis Althusser, there was a time when it became compulsory to always privilege the relations of production over the forces of production. The specifics of technical change fell from view. But there was a trade-off, in that relations of reproduction came into view, and with them questions of women's unpaid labor, the gender division of labor and so forth. However, I think that Préciado opens up another path, following in the wake of Donna Haraway instead. That would be to ask about the forces of reproduction. Then we would not always be relegating questions of gender and sex to some place outside of technical questions. Then one might also start to ask (with Jason Moore) what reproduction might even mean in the era of metabolic rift.

taken from Public Seminar

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